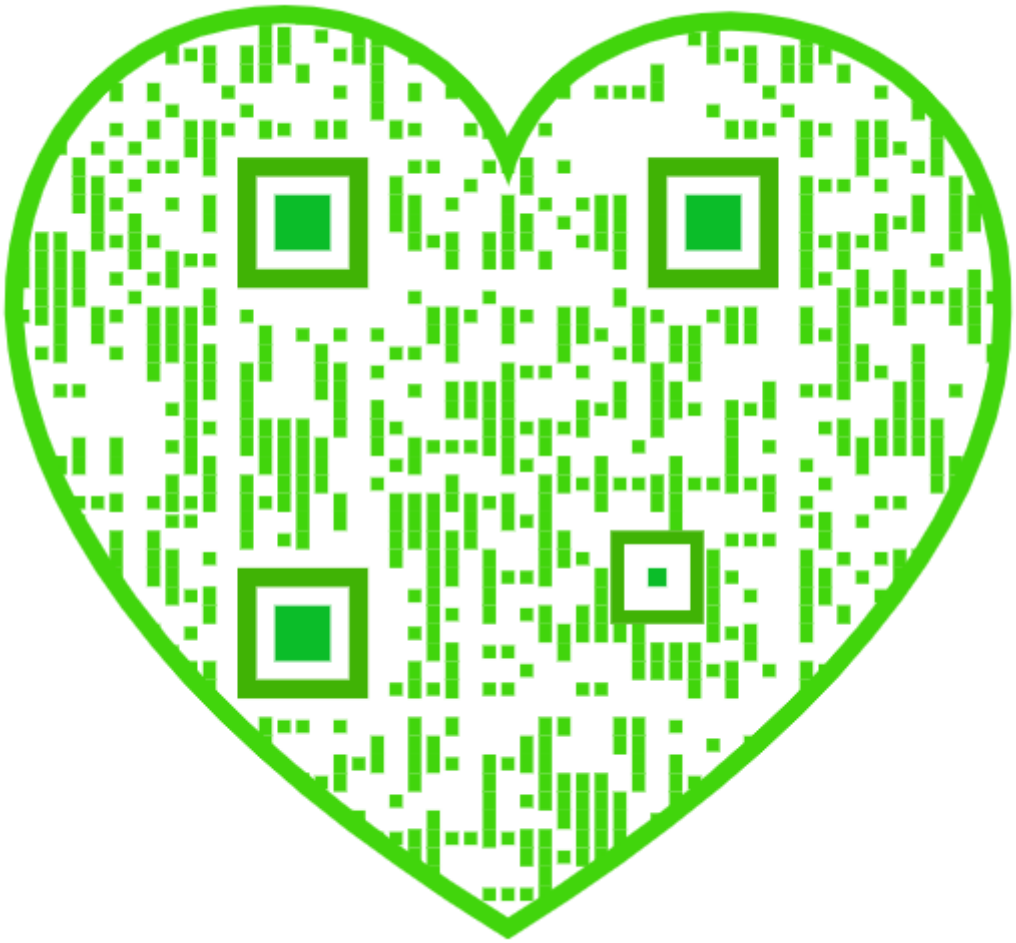
"AS NATURAL AS LIFE."

CHARLES G. AMES.



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"As Natural as Life"

STUDIES OF
THE INNER KINGDOM

BY
CHARLES G. AMES,
MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF THE DISCIPLES, BOSTON.

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"Let the great forces, wise of old,
Have their full way with thee."
—Edward Rowland Sill.

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KEY-NOTES.

THE ideas contained in the four papers here printed gather around the central conception of the Good Life — the life which is most truly divine when most richly human.

1. The Good Life, in striving toward conformity with nature as the expression of the Perfect Mind, seeks to correct whatever is amiss.
2. The Good Life is the Life of Sonship, which humbly accepts its own aspirations as inspirations of the indwelling Father.
3. The Good Life is made perfect, not *by* suffering, but *through* suffering, which is but an incident in the large process of evolution.
4. The Good Life "does not suffer itself to be interrupted." It unfolds in time, but it belongs to eternity.

"AS NATURAL AS LIFE."

Come forth into the light of things!
Let Nature be your teacher. . . .
Sweet is the lore that Nature brings!
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things
We murder to dissect.
—*Wordsworth.*

A man's best things are nearest him,
Lie close about his feet. —*Milnes.*

Socrates said, "Those who want fairest things are nearest to the gods." —*Diogenes Laertius.*

Things that are have kinship with things that are from the beginning. Further, this Nature is styled Truth, and it is the First Cause of all that is true.
—*Marcus Aurelius.*

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein.
I muse on Thy works; I meditate on the works of Thy hands. —*Hebrew Psalms.*

And when he came to himself, he said, . . . I will arise and go to my father.
—*Story of the Prodigal.*

"AS NATURAL AS LIFE."

"All riches, goods and braveries never told,
Of earth, sun, air and heaven—now I hold
Your being in my being; I am ye,
And ye myself; yea, lastly, Thee,
God, whom my roads all reach, howe'er they run,
My Father, Friend, Belovèd, dear All-One!
. . . . . .
The great bird Purpose bears me on her wings,
And I am one with all the kinsmen things
That e'er my Father fathered."

—*Sidney Lanier.*

An elderly lady, whose life has been richly filled with beneficence, and whose spirit seems to be in joyous touch with everything true and beautiful and good, tells me that in her childhood she stood by her mother's knee and recited lessons from a catechism written by Dr. Channing. One question ran like this: "When I walk abroad, what do I see?" The

answer was: "I see the blue sky, the bright sun, the grass waving in the breeze, the beautiful flowers and the singing birds." Then came the question, "Who made all these lovely and wonderful things?" The object was to direct the mind "through nature up to nature's God." Thus all common things were associated with thoughts of the great and good and wise Author. The child was made aware of the spiritual order by means of the pleasant impressions made on the senses, just as the same child must have learned what love is through feeling the clasp of warm arms and seeing the smile of a kind face. And my friend remembers, at seventy, that as she stood by her mother, on a spring day, reciting this delightful lesson, "the roses were blooming under the window, the dandelions looked up from the grass, the purple martins warbled among the trees, and the catechism itself seemed to be a part of all the loveliness of the world." So her

religious feelings opened like the flowers, and glad reverence for the Eternal was as spontaneous as affection for her mother. Faith, hope and love were not forced or artificial sentiments; they sung themselves into her young life just as the birds sung among the trees. It all seemed as natural as life. The receptive heart of the child was penetrated by a feeling far beyond anything in the catechism — a power too deep for words, too deep for thought; the feeling and the power which Wordsworth tries to body forth as a Presence —

> "Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,—
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things."

It pleased me to learn that Samuel Longfellow was taught in his childhood from the same little book; and I remembered what Channing himself once said about his boy-

hood's walk on the shore of Narragansett Bay, where, "in reverential sympathy with the power around him, he became conscious of the power within." Why not? Is it not all one power? And there was something in the tone of the story which brought to mind the Galilean teacher who taught men to know the heavenly Father by considering the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air. Perhaps Christianity has its strongest hold upon us in this very thing, that it does not draw any sharp dividing line between natural and supernatural, or physical and spiritual, but brings together heaven and earth, God and man, so that our common experiences shade off imperceptibly into the infinite mysteries, and the things seen and temporal blend with things unseen and eternal. And thus religion is *as natural as life.* What room is there for a non-natural religion?

But as Lessing said in Germany, a hundred years ago, "This is not an enlightened age;

it is an age *becoming* enlightened." We have yet to clear our minds of a deal of fog; we have yet to open our eyes to the riches and glory of our inheritance, and to the immeasurable privilege of existence.

There ought to be, and therefore there must be, a way of taking our place and our part in this universe which would put us in harmony with all its facts and forces and laws,—in harmony with each other and with the whole order of things. Then we should realize the perfect will of the Creator and our own highest happiness.

How shall we come at this better way? Does it need any change in the order of the world? Or must there be a change in ourselves? Here is the answer of Paul: In order to realize the perfect will of God, "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." We must have an inward invigoration, a mental and moral unfolding, the development in ourselves of a deeper life, with higher principles

and larger powers; — we must let the divine powers have their way with us; — in short, we must *grow*. We must advance in clearness and largeness of intelligence, in purity and nobleness of feeling, in steadiness and power of will: our proper nature must unfold into the image of God.

But, one thing is better known in our time than it could be in the time of Paul: This growth of mind and heart and will is greatly helped by our coming into active and orderly relations with nature and with humanity. The forces of spiritual vitality are circulating forces; they are transmissible forces; they come to us through the media of heredity and environment. Our heredity includes all the past history of the race and its accumulated gains; our environment includes all our relationships with the world of nature and of man. God gives himself to us, not only by the direct influence of His spirit, but through the thousand channels opened by

knowledge, affection and action. The transforming of our being and the renewing of our minds goes on by the help of the outward world, even by the inhalation of oxygen; and we vibrate to the touch of human sympathies and to the throbbing of souls and stars. The more fully and vitally we are related to the rest of creation,— to nature and to humanity,— the more rich and complete will be our life. And we must turn our attention this way.

Religion is defined as the tie or bond which holds man to his Maker; but if he is held to his Maker through all these appointed relations, then religion includes every tie which binds him to the worlds of matter and of mind. What we call the physical is therefore a part or expression of the spiritual order, and the whole system of things, seen and unseen, is a unity and a harmony of which each one of us is meant to be an honorable part. Religion is therefore a feeling of this unity, a sense of this harmony, a glad acceptance of our

place and our part in the whole. And *sin is separation,* a breach of the unities. The branch withers, if divided from the vine; no organ is sound, unless it shares the life of the body; no body is sound, unless it shares the life of nature; and nature, I think, is in good running order only because it is full of that wisdom, power, and goodness which we call God.

Consider for a moment the meaning of the word "nature." It comes from *natus,* "to be born"; and when we apply the word to the whole system of created things, we imply that this system is the outbirth of a supreme parentage; that the world itself has been produced by some adequate Power. In the large sense, nature is a term which covers everything in the universe except the producing Cause. In this sense man is a part of nature; though in common speech we confine the term to the physical world around us.

Let us go back for a moment to the little

girl in the rural home, with her mother and the catechism, with the flowers and the birds. The book alone would not have done much for her, nor is it likely that the beauty of the world would have made such a deep and tender appeal, if there had been no atmosphere of human love. Nor would the human love alone give the great interpretation. All these factors wrought together, under the prompting of the unseen Spirit, to open the mind and heart of the child with transforming and renewing power. And is there any day of any life from which any one of these gracious helps is wholly absent? We may be dull, inert, unresponsive, torpid; but the sky bends above, human companionship is around, the word of truth is spoken in our ears or stored in our memory, and ever there is a still, small voice whispering of things unseen, and bidding us "be transformed by the renewing of our minds." Our noblest moods and deepest experiences, of joy or sorrow, seem to draw

us, as with living cords, into universal sympathies and fellowships. How can we ever be alone and unrelated? The lesson of Channing's catechism comes simply to this: Accept the world as a whole; accept it as God's world and yours; and then you will be free to let your own life expand and enrich itself by taking possession of the particulars as fast as you are able.

This simple openness of mind and heart — this trusting, responsive, receptive attitude of the unspoiled child — holds in itself the secret of scholarship, the highest philosophy, and the wisdom of the angels. There is no other door into the kingdom, no other way into the spiritual order. It is the ground principle of honesty, or moral and intellectual rectitude, to let every fact of the world impress us at its full value; as it is also the part of self-respect and self-justice to meet all realities as if we ourselves were as real as any of them. At the heart's core of it all is a deep instinctive

faith in the universal order and the Power which is above all, through all, and in all. To submit our whole being to that Power in fearless, childlike confidence, at every stage of our history, is to be continuously transformed and renewed, re-created and born again.

One lesson we are ever learning—the lesson of unity in variety and variety in unity. Think how many features come together to make a face or a landscape, and what an assortment of objects we look upon whenever we open our eyes! The rocks are not like the streams; the forests are not like the fields; the hills are not like the plains; the birds are not like the flowers; the sky is not like the sea; the stars are not like the clouds; the night is not like the day.

Yet they all harmonize; they make up well into a composite whole; they belong to a large system; we could not spare one line or tint, one light or shadow. Every aspect of nature affects us in a way of its own; yet all aspects

unite in a common impression, like the unlike words that make a sentence, or the consonant and vowel sounds that make a word. This silent and sublime sympathy of creation is performed by a vast orchestra; each instrument supports every other; each separate note contributes to the completeness, and is both lost and found in the universal harmony. One breath sweeps through every pipe; one hand touches every key and string. And we are present at the mighty concert, and are a part of it.

Every object on which the sun shines tells of the sun; every creature that lives by help of its light and warmth, reveals the power of the sun. The sun helps us to understand the fixed stars, because they too are suns. Then all the heavenly bodies, taken together, impress us with the extent, grandeur and unity of creation. So we rise to a conception of what the Greeks called the Kosmos — the beautiful ordered universe. We cannot stop there. The

constellations are not more real than we are; and in ourselves we find facts of a higher order than all those shining globes. We find reason, affection and free self-directing power, with this commanding sense of right and wrong. So we learn that the material order is merely the theatre of that higher kind of order to which we belong, and which we call the moral or spiritual order. The whole system of things includes both, — includes matter and mind, with all their laws, powers and possibilities. And our own existence as intelligent beings is the one fact which we can never doubt. Consciousness is the eye with which the mind sees itself; and this faculty of self-recognition gives us a key to the knowledge of that universal Spirit which "hides in pure transparency," and which Jesus has taught us to call our Father.

There are these two ways of taking nature — the poetic and the scientific. We muse and we meditate. The poet sees the rose as a

whole — sees it as a picture. He drinks in its form and color just as he inhales its fragrance; it affects him as if it were the living spirit of beauty — a fair sister of his own. The man of science must have a name for it; he must pick it to pieces, study the arrangement of its parts, and compare them with the structure of other flowers. But the moment he begins to admire and wonder and enjoy, he becomes a poet; and he may be all the more a poet because of his knowledge. So in the larger way; the poet *feels* the world which the scientific man only sees and studies. He takes possession of the world through his intellect, while the poet lets the world take possession of him through insight, imagination and affection. Each sees aspects of nature to which the other is partly blind. One hunts for facts to be analyzed and classified; the other reads the expression of the same facts, and sets them to music. These two men enter the temple at different

doors. The scientist is more observant of the architecture; the poet faces the altar.

But by either method, nature becomes a school. The plain, dry facts are rich in meaning; and meaning, or the soul of reality, is what the mind of man forever seeks. The more clearly we think, and the more truly we feel, the more full of significance we find our facts; for the more apparent becomes the order of the world. Our reason is never satisfied with confusion and chaos; we are looking everywhere for harmony and perfection. If we do not see it everywhere, we may fairly suspect ourselves of something like color-blindness. Nature is a great and a deep book; but we are poor readers.

We are indebted to science for showing us the laws of the world; to poetry for showing us that these laws are alive,— that they are the expression of mind and the movement of love. Science helps us faintly to apprehend how vast and how old and how rich the

universe must be; poetry helps us to live in it as children at home, with a joyful sense of relationship to all that is, or was, or is to be. But outsight is necessary to insight.

The germs of both science and poetry are in every mind. For we all love knowledge, and we also build castles. The child that cares for flowers and stars is already a botanist and an astronomer; already a poet looks out of the young eyes that gaze with pleased wonder on the flight of a bird, an apple-tree in bloom, or a running stream. The method of the kindergarten is only one way of following out the hint which nature everywhere gives of the divine plan of educating the mind and soul of man. We have hardly begun to realize the religious value of our five senses.

When we have no sense of the sacramental quality of the works of God, we may safely suspect that in ourselves there is some disorder, defect, or immaturity. Then we are like blind men, moving all unaware through

the Museum of Art; or like the deaf, sitting in the Music Hall while the orchestra performs a symphony. What a rebuke to our frivolity, our sordidness, our philanthropies, and even to our religion, that we find ourselves insensitive to the beauties and glories and harmonies amid which we live and move and have our being! Often we disqualify ourselves for enjoying nature by giving way to sadness, and might join in the confession of William Watson:

"Fast bound I sat, the thrall of inward gloom;
Heard the great tidal rhythm of Life and Law
Unheeding; and without emotion saw
The flower-like world's immortal tint and bloom."

Are we really so low down? Can we give no better reason for our stupidity than the oxen might give? Or have we taken up in some form the sensual philosophy of the man who said that he had found nothing on earth that satisfied him so well as tobacco? Or are we like the company described by Thackeray,

who drew the parlor curtains to shut out the sunset, that they might light the lamps for a game of cards?

It would be a pity to pass through the world like passengers in a sleeping-car, and perhaps find out, too late, that we have missed what we came here for. Here let me tell the story of the aged French priest, with whom an American gentleman picked up an acquaintance on the Pacific Railroad. The priest told him that he had started for a journey round the world; and that he was put up to it by a dream. He dreamed that he died and met the good God. The good God asked him how he liked the world he had come from. He was obliged to answer that he didn't look at it; that he had spent his time in performing the offices of the church, in repeating prayers, and in getting ready to die. When he awoke from the dream, he resolved, old as he was, that if the good God would let him stay here a little longer, he would take a square look

at this world before he was summoned for another such examination. He had furnished himself with some little books of physical geography, geology, mineralogy and botany, and was reading and looking, reading and looking, and so preparing for death by a new method.

I doubt if any of us have fairly considered the spiritual value of natural knowledge. There is a strong hint of it in the parables of Jesus; and the germ of it may be found in some noble passages of the Hebrew Psalms, where the writers forgot to complain of their enemies, their bodily ailments and their moods of morbidness and dolefulness. We can never be too grateful for such Psalms as the 104th, 107th and 148th, as lofty inspirations of reverence for the Power that makes for beauty as well as for righteousness.

And why may we not give thanks to the same spirit of illumination for the modern minstrels and sages who have taught us the

loveliness of the world we live in, as well as for the devoted students who have shown us the methods and stages of development by which the earth with the fulness thereof has been brought forward during the uncounted ages since it was a vast cloud of fire-mist?

Nature is clean and wholesome. Purity of thought and feeling is helped by such mental companionship,— by the society of rocks, trees, hills, streams, clouds, and the comings and goings of days and seasons. We can generally trust a man who really loves to be alone in the grove, or beside the sea, or under the stars; and the boy who is on the hunt for natural collections, or watching the habits of birds, and trying to name them without a gun. And if in every city there could be cheap, bright, taking popular lectures on all the natural sciences, with colored or stereopticon pictures, and if the young folk and the hard-worked men and women could have a Saturday half-holiday for illustrative excursions

to the country, I believe it would be a good way to counteract the saloon.

How shall we know man? Study nature. How know nature? Study man. How know God? Study both nature and man. There is no clear and sharp boundary between nature, man and God. We think a boundary, but we cannot fix nor find any. All the realities are interconnected; each leads to all, and all to each.

> "A subtle chain of countless rings,
> The nearest to the farthest brings."

Everything we learn of nature outside of man seems like a parable, intended to illustrate and interpret man to himself. As in nature every individual object or aspect comes in for a share in the greatness of all, and all facts are related as parts of the larger whole, so it must be with our individual human lives: each has a sanctity of its own, yet each is bound up and blended with all the rest. The democracy of humanity is the kingdom of God;

but the King forever insists that it shall *be* a democracy, for it is His good pleasure to give the kingdom and the sovereignty to the least of these His children, that we may all reign together while we serve each other, and all serve while we reign.

What! shall we see the sun in every ray, and the earth in every grain of sand, and yet *not* see the divine light in every mind, and the divine love in every life, however obscured? The great world-forces — gravity, chemistry, electricity — are as busy in the grime and foulness as they are in the crystal and the whiteness of the lily; and why do we doubt that the spiritual forces are as busy in lives depressed by misfortune, or darkened by ignorance, or besotted by sin, as in the enlightenment of sages or the inspiration of saints? For the unity is unbroken; upward or downward, the scale is continuous. The one life is in the lowest forms as well as the highest; the one love fills the hells as well

as the heavens. There is indeed a nobler kind of music;

> "But in the mud and scum of things,
> There always, always something sings."

We do not see the whole of anything. Indeed we see very little of anything. And there are aspects of the world which do not directly encourage our faith, our hope or our love, yet make a demand upon us for these graces in highest measure. There are aspects of nature which affect us like an overture of Wagner, in which everything is said to be "enormous, savage, elementary, like the murmur of forests and the roar of animals." These aspects of nature help us to understand our own low development and that of our race. The voices of beasts and birds, and below these the voices of winds and waves, are like inarticulate expressions of spirits which are not yet fully conscious. We share the chaos; we detect it in our baser moods and duller moments.

But suppose we look up, instead of down. The highest expressions of truth and harmony, in poetry, music, science, philosophy, religion, give us encouraging hints of a state into which we have not yet risen; but to which we belong, as the bird unhatched belongs to the light and the air. And even when we look down, let us thank God and take courage. For the lower facts serve the higher, and build its foundations.

> "The fiery pillars of the morns
> Rest on the sunken nights."

The musical composer catches hints from winds, brooks, resounding seas, plashing rains and thunder-peals, as well as from bird-notes and tones of the human voice. So does the poet find in natural facts the pigments to paint his thought in word-pictures that glow in his lines like Raphael's on the canvas.

It grows upon us as a rational conviction, and as a happy faith, that we need nothing but to live according to nature; that is, in

harmony with the laws of the world. By nature, is meant the whole system of things; and the whole system of things must be an expression of the will of God, as well as of his honor and wisdom. Harmony with the will of God is the same thing as harmony with the natural order.

I do not think that the churches have ever realized the spiritual value of natural knowledge, of physical science, of good literature and of intellectual culture. Every fact is a doorway into the temple of truth. Religion will never grow robust and masterful unless it is nourished with a stronger diet. Piety remains puny when it is fed exclusively on emotional mush, and faith is feeble if it be not exercised in the open air of fact. The difficulty is, we do not appeal directly to the original instincts of the soul; we speak of religion as if it were something foreign and imported, something which is not as natural as life, because a part of life and the very

inmost part, but as something which must be inserted, or forced upon man from without. It fails to connect itself with the actual experiences of men and women in the life they are obliged to live every day of the week. It points to a heaven that does not touch the earth, and to a God who does not dwell with men.

It is not chiefly by goody-goody talk of morals or of religion that the higher life of men is nourished and strengthened; it is by helping them to see and feel their relations to the large and beautiful order of nature and humanity, and to see in that order the kingdom of God. It is by clearing their vision and expanding their sympathy; by opening to them the reality and wonder of the world they already inhabit; by showing them that the inward and the outward are two sides of one great fact. One Spirit pervades all things, as it pervades all beings. What we call Supernature is never absent

from nature. Something akin to our souls is in grass and trees and stones, as well as in our poor relations, the dumb animals; and if there are higher beings that people the realms of inaccessible light, they too must be our kindred, and we shall slowly climb to their company.

We must make room in our minds, in our tastes, in our sympathies, in our religion, and in our lives, for all we can learn both of nature and of humanity. We must multiply points of contact — thoughtful and loving contact — with these large, rich regions of God's creation. We ought to know that we live in them as truly as we live in our houses. When we realize this, perhaps we shall be more concerned to brighten and beautify our surroundings, to put away physical and social disorder and ugliness, to cheer the lives of our daily companions, and to uplift mankind to the levels of truth, justice and good-will; for these, too, are "as natural as life."

SELF-PRESERVATION.

Who to himself is law no law doth need,
Offends no law, and is a king indeed.
—*Chapman.*

It is the mind that makes the man; and our vigor is in our immortal soul. —*Ovid.*

A wise man never loses anything, if he has himself.
—*Montaigne.*

No man can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself.
—*Lowell.*

Such as are thy habitual thoughts, such will be the character of thy mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts. . . . A man should *be* upright; not be *kept* upright. —*Marcus Aurelius.*

You are doing a man no good unless you are making him better. —*Rufus Ellis.*

Great weakness is often produced by indulgences which seem of no importance. —*Molinos.*

What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, if he lose himself? —*Jesus.*

SELF-PRESERVATION.

"Great God, I ask no higher pelf
Than that I may not disappoint myself."
—*Thoreau.*

Christians of all creeds are agreed with deep-thoughted men of other names in one thing: They believe that the Supreme Mind is in such direct connection with the mind of man as to influence our thoughts, feelings and purposes; and they call this inflowing divine breath the Holy Spirit, because its tendency is to make holy spirits of us. They also agree that it is in each man's power to resist this pure influence, and thus to weaken its operation.

"Quench not the spirit," says Paul. But does his warning refer to the Spirit of God,

or to the spirit of man? Probably to the former; but practically it comes to the same thing, whichever we take it; for we cannot resist the divine influence without impairing our own life, nor impair our own life without diminishing the divine influence. Whenever we put aside any suggestion of truth, any impulse to goodness, or any prompting to right conduct, we obscure the inward light. And since every measure of light or life which we enjoy is given to us by "the Power not ourselves," it is plain that we can know nothing about the Spirit of God except as it is manifest in the spirit of man.

Therefore we may say that the Spirit of God and the spirit of man are too close to be separated. In resisting the divine prompting man weakens his own faculties. In turning away from the light he obscures his own vision. Who can draw the line, and say, "This true thought or this right feeling is God's inspiration, which I must heed or sink

into darkness; and that true thought or right feeling is merely human, and I may do with it as I please"?

The life within, is it not divine as well as human? The fountain, out of which our being comes like a stream, how shall we find it if not by following up the stream? The sun, of which each human soul is a projected ray, how shall we find it but by following up the ray? But the stream reveals the fountain and the ray reveals the sun. As James Freeman Clarke says, "In every mind there is a door opening inward toward God."

"Quench not the spirit." It is a word of deep wisdom and warning. It means, among other things, "Do thyself no harm." Preserve your individuality. Do not impair the life-forces. Do not disqualify yourself for receiving impressions of reality from the world around, or illuminations from the light within. Do not suppress that original and spontaneous activity which is proper to your

own nature. The only serious danger lies in arrested or perverted development; and this comes from checking or misdirecting the vital energy. Theodore Munger says, "The thing we are apt to fail of to-day is not breadth and thoroughness of knowledge of what is about us, but knowledge of what is above us and within us."

We quench the spirit, then, when we darken our own minds or disobey our higher instincts and rational impulses. Our being weakens and withers like the leaf when its connection with the life-giving tree is interrupted. We are kept in health and soundness only by our harmony with the law and order of nature, which is the law and order of earth and heaven.

Every substance in nature has its own peculiar qualities; each kind of wood, metal or stone, each liquid, gas or element, has its own way of behaving; every tree has its own foliage, every seed its own product, every

flower its own fragrance, every fruit its own flavor, every meat its own savor. No substance loses its proper qualities without being debased or destroyed. The iron that ceases to be fibrous may be good for casting at the foundry, but is unfit for the forge; the wood or stone that has lost its cohesion is spoiled for building material; even a cloud on the pane of glass suspends its transparency; every degree of adulteration lowers the value, as when milk is mixed with water. There are, indeed, valuable compounds, but the new value is gained by giving up the old. Nature is full of these spiritual parables.

In a deep way, we are all alike, else we could not understand each other. In other ways, we all differ, else we should be stupidly uninteresting. Each human being is a new specimen, an original, marked inside and out with capacities for new experiences, achievements and uses. To destroy individuality for the sake of uniformity would

take the charm out of life and society; for the charm consists largely in unlikeness, in variety, and in the surprises of originality. There are valuable combinations or organizations of human beings; and no temple, no cathedral, no "white city," can be so noble or beautiful as good society would be. Each one of us is bound to suppress all tendencies or qualities in himself which would unsuit him for living with others. Yet all that contributes to his own personal completeness must also enrich and enlarge his contribution to the common life. And, as no one of us ought to debase or injure his own being, so no one of us has any business to require of himself or of his neighbor any suppression or mutilation of personality; no, not even to secure the benefits of union, co-operation or fellowship.

Any religion deserving the name must teach this great lesson of self-respect or self-preservation. If a man wishes to be somebody, can

he do any better than to be himself? Let him stand quietly, yet stoutly, for this proprietorship. He does not gain or keep his own standing by pushing at other people, but by letting the better spirit, the deep kingly reason, rule him, and have its way with him. Let him become a solid positive quantity; and the place or part which belongs to him in creation will be forever secure.

There need be no crowding; for in the world of souls there is as much room as there is in heaven for the stars. If every man, woman and child on this planet could win the greatest fulness of life, the richest development of all personal qualities, and if every mind could think and love and live like a god, there would be far fewer collisions and far less confusion than now. These multiplied human forces would play without friction, and in utmost freedom,

> "As sunbeams stream through liberal space,
> And nothing jostle or displace."

This is well said and sung by George MacDonald:

"O God of mountains, stars and boundless spaces,
O God of freedom and of joyous hearts,
When Thy face looketh forth from all men's faces,
There will be room enough in crowded marts."

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature." This proverb has a higher application than we have realized. It has been applied chiefly to the care of our bodies. We are strongly charged with an instinct which makes us shun a danger, dodge a blow, keep out of fire or water, and let alone what we suppose to be poison. We are on the lookout for good chances to get a living, and to add to the living whatever makes life comfortable and pleasant.

But we do not so easily get acquainted with our higher nature and needs; we do not so soon learn to avoid dangers to our minds and hearts — the dangers of unwholesome principles or disorderly emotions. To catch malarial

fever, to lose an arm in some machinery, or to be suffocated in foul air, is felt as a calamity. Why should a man be less careful to shun exposures which impair his power to think, to reason, to remember, to judge; or which starve or poison or waste his affections, or scorch his soul with fiery passions; or which drown him in a sea of pollutions; or which weaken his will, and thus paralyze his powers of action; or which in any way spoil his best chances of making a true man of himself?

A society made up of people all alike would be dreadfully tiresome; and if all my companions are only echoes of myself, I might as well be alone. The divine plan does not seem to be that men should be all pressed or moulded into one shape, like bricks or bullets; but rather that they should grow in freedom, differing as naturally as tree-leaves, landscapes, and cloud-forms, no two of which are exactly alike. The law of self-preservation

requires that each individual should save himself from being deformed, mutilated, or pressed out of his proper shape, either by submission to false authority, by artificial methods of education, by social pressure, or even by the influences and institutions of religion. The worst use we can make of the name of God is to scare a man out of his own growth. A free church or a free state should encourage every form of talent and every variety of gift and genius; just as a growing tree finds room in the air and light for the expansion of its own limbs and leaves.

Amid such variety there will be no lack of unity; for all the forms which spring from one root will share the common type, and will differ only in their sub-types. There is no objection to one man's being much like another, if only he grows so, and thus comes honestly by the likeness. To cultivate oddities and eccentricities, to differ from others out of mere caprice, would only give us a race

of cranks and disagreeable pretenders. We quench the spirit by unsocial and anti-social wilfulness as surely as by cowardly conformity.

But it is best for the individual, and best for the race, that every one should live his own life and cultivate his own inward garden; that he should courageously do his own thinking and stand to the verdict of his own judgment; that he should give fair play to his own sentiments and tastes, and that he should work out his own career and style of character. Yet society is honey-combed with insincerities, with the affectation of sentiments and opinions which have no inward reality. "At all cost," says Carlyle, "it is to be prayed by all men that shams may cease."

If a man is not to see for himself, why did the Creator give him a pair of eyes? If he is not to live his own life, why is it made necessary that he should do his own eating, breathing, and sleeping? He must have a

certain place wherein to live and move and have his being; and why is he not entitled to fill that place? Why is he not entitled to an orbit of his own as truly as any one of the planets? And since in each of us there is incarnated some part of the power and wisdom and love of the Eternal, is it not a profanation and a sacrilege to quench or smother our own spirits?

But this doctrine is quite radical and revolutionary. It puts us to shame for allowing our lives to be ruled by what other people say and do; for overrating the importance of conventionalities which are burdensome, and of social usages which our reason disapproves. It runs in the face of all those methods of training children by which we overlay and overload their minds and check the growth of their faculties. It condemns us for putting into them so much that is ours, instead of trying to draw out what is theirs. It rebukes us for discouraging

those inborn peculiarities which are neither defects nor excesses.

In every child there is an original fountain of thought, feeling, and action which ought to be allowed to flow without obstruction in all of the channels of right and reasonable living. Where there is any degree of malformation, from hereditary or other causes, this divine force will flow in disorderly streams. Then the channels require correction; but the stream is always to be trusted. It may be choked or misdirected, but it is the river of life; and our business is not to arrest the flow, but to see that the precious tide does not run to waste or mischief.

Of course, every child needs a start. No, not a start; that is given with life itself. But it needs regulative guidance. There is no case on record where a new-born baby dressed itself and immediately began to go alone. But parents, nurses and teachers cannot add anything to native endowments;

they can only preserve and wisely direct the inborn forces until the child's own discretion has time to grow. As fast as it grows, it is entitled to take the lead; that is, to take care of itself. Then the command is, "Hands off! Let God do His own work in His own way."

We sometimes hear of grown-up persons — women oftener than men — whose fathers or mothers never allowed them to acquire the freedom of directing their own lives, but treated them in part as permanent babies. Such parents may act from love, but certainly they do not act from wisdom. Practically, they deform and enslave their children. And there are some who enslave themselves in trying to save their children from the discipline of self-activity.

Nothing is so weakening as repression, or enforced idleness, which soon becomes willing idleness. The child's power can only be developed by use. Discretion and skill are learned through the blunders of practice. Do

we not learn to talk by stammering, and to walk by stumbling? When the little one first begins to reach out and grasp, and cry for something, it is an inspired impulse to activity. Then comes the mother's opportunity to encourage independence, by letting the child help itself as fast and as far as it can do so with safety. If, at the same time, the affections are wakened and warmed, the little hand that is now reached out to take will soon be reached out to give.

Thus, in the young life, three things will appear in close connection: thought, love and action — the triple apparatus with which every well-born child is set up in business. In the free use of this apparatus, comes self-possession. These powers of thought, feeling and action belong to the child; indeed, they are the child. They express the divine image — the likeness of the heavenly Father, whom we think of as all-wise, all-good and almighty.

But native qualities do not always appear in the same combinations. When the mammas get together, each can tell of some remarkable thing said or done by her little one; but no two of the darlings have said or done the same thing. Each baby is an original; each gives out its own peculiar music; each improvises its own little drama.

Now, if this development be not interrupted or put under the pressure of some uniformity-machine, in the family, the school, or the church, each child will develop some special tendencies and peculiarities, just as it will have its own face and features, voice and manner. Think what we all lose by these interruptions. We dwell in a society where a few conventional forms are forever repeated; whereas our world of men and women might be vastly enriched by beautiful diversities, so that we should never get tired of each other.

Let us not repress or quench the divinely given human forces. Let us preserve with

great care the spontaneous element in the children and in ourselves. This is the source of all originality, all genius and personal power. The wrong done to Chinese girls by confining their feet in iron shoes is not so dreadful as this other wrong of cramping and misshaping the mind and character.

We not only suppress speech and action; we arrest thought and feeling, and drive the forces of life back to stagnate in their fountain. I think thousands on thousands of people suffer a vague sense of unhappiness which may have had its origin in the violence done to their inborn faculties when they were too young and tender to stand up against the tyranny; a tyranny not always harsh, but often unwisely kind. There are other thousands whose native tendencies were checked but not subdued; who asserted their liberty in ill-tempered and disorderly ways, like the stream which gathers force to sweep away the dam and desolate the valley.

Not all lives are thus misshapen and perverted. There are beautiful characters and careers in which the divinely human elements have freely unfolded according to orderly creative processes. There are men and women who can see more, feel deeplier, and do nobler than we; men and women who get more out of life and out of the world, and put more in, because they have better possession of themselves. The conditions which make us sigh make them sing: Browning says of such an one:

> "Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke.
> . . . . . .
> A look was in his eye, as if where'er he gazed
> There stood a star."

Why do we call such a man inspired? Precisely because in him the spirit has not been quenched. But if some find the world so good and fair, while to others it is dull and humdrum, or if some gather luscious fruit from the trees that grow along the

common ways, while others find everything tasteless or bitter, must not the difference be in their own inward conditions? In those the spirit is alive and wakeful; in these, it is sick or torpid.

It is not to be supposed that every one of us might become a great scholar, poet, prophet, artist, inventor, statesman or philosopher. Nobody can give a recipe for the manufacture of genius, nor lay down a set of rules by which one child can be made a Pericles and another a Demosthenes, one a Saint John and another a Saint Paul, one a Michael Angelo and another a Shakspere, one a Tennyson and another an Emerson, one a Lucretia Mott and another a Fanny Kemble. The genial humor of Charles Lamb, the brilliant wit of Sidney Smith, the creative power of George Eliot are no product of college or kindergarten. They grow from original qualities which can no more be explained than we can explain the differing odors of the flowers. But we

should never have heard of these famous men and women, who have brightened and blessed the world, if they had been kept under extinguishers, or had quenched the light in themselves.

It is said that in Massachusetts there are two hundred thousand acres of unused land which might be made to add immensely to the common wealth and welfare. But we let far finer resources run to waste. Think of the unused manhood and the suppressed womanhood! Think of the thousands of children whose lives grow all out of shape from the pressure of evils and follies they know not how to measure or resist! Think of the human temples of the Holy Spirit which are profaned and desolated! Think of the deaf ears that turn away from the beautiful and holy truths widely and faithfully spoken! Think of the vast howling deserts of humanity which might bud and blossom as the rose, and grow fair with culture like

the garden of the Lord! As there are plants that grow stunted and deformed in the dim light of caverns, there are homes or workshops in which men and women live or toil amid cheerless shadows; and there are conditions of ignorance and moral exposure by which multitudes miss those helps toward the better life which are freely offered to all.

"What is not good for the swarm is not good for the bee." We must prosper or suffer together. One startling and awful fact is being brought home to us by the modern study of social problems; namely, this: That spiritual activity — whether we refer to the divine or the human — is a collective and public as well as a private and individual operation; and that the selfishness of one part of society can cut off the spiritual supplies of another part by consigning them to physical, intellectual and moral privations, and to an unwholesome environment which makes low living practically

inevitable. Those who draw every breath in an atmosphere charged with fine and helpful influences, and who are surrounded from infancy with every means of culture and every aid to completeness, may for a time be innocently unaware of the exposure of their less fortunate brethren. We always lose by any attempt to secede from our proper human connections. But we quench the holiest spirit in ourselves whenever we harden our hearts against the "submerged" millions, or turn indifferently away from those who are in a state of arrested development.

It is cruel to say that these childish masses "might help themselves," so long as they do not know how, and have no adequate means of finding out. Dungeon walls are not more impervious to light than is the darkened mind. Manacled limbs are not more helpless than is the unawakened spirit. And the dead can come out of their graves as easily as the

more depressed classes can rise under the triple pressure of their own inertia, their sense of hopelessness, and the crowding of those above them.

Yet in the lowest and least promising conditions the seeds of all virtues and all excellences may lie dormant, awaiting the quickening touch of truth and love. Blessed are they who freely give the spiritual impulse they have freely received! Blessed are they who prepare the way of the Lord by opening the gates of opportunity, by removing social and economical obstructions, by "leveling upward," and by wisely improving the paths along which humanity may move toward a worthier destiny! The educated and prosperous can find their own way of safety only by yielding to the self-forgetting impulses of sympathy and service. This is to obey in spirit the injunction of Jesus: "Sell all, give to the poor, and have treasure in heaven." Whatever our possessions may be, spiritual or

material, we must make them available to the common welfare — or lose our souls.

This subject ought to throw some light on the meaning of Christianity, which seeks completeness of life for all mankind. Herein also is the root of true democracy or free society, and "the government of all the people by all the people, for all the people,"— a system which can never be realized till the individual members of society are self-governed and alive from within. This is what all reforms look toward — the proper freedom of the human mind, or its emancipation from all authority which checks the action of reason and conscience. This is the meaning of the pleas that are now made for the enfranchisement of women, for the wiser care of children, for the better education of all the people. It means that no power on earth shall defeat the soul, or quench the spirit of man, or mar the loving purpose of God.

It means the orderly development of every human being and of every human faculty.

We are born to live in society, yet to live as individuals. Self-preservation is the prime condition of this two-fold development. It requires that we should both accept help and render help; also that we should both resist harm and refrain from harm. Personality is impaired and society suffers if we violate either of these four precepts.

Certainly we should value, for public and private reasons, the laws and liberties of the land and the agencies of common welfare and culture. Certainly we should welcome for ourselves the tender and gentle inward ministry of thoughts and feelings that are like angel visitants. We should hold our own hearts loyal and responsive to all the holy and happy voices that are best heard in silence.

Is it not worth while to keep open and clear, for ourselves and for all mankind, these paths that lead upward toward perfection?

HEART-ACHE AND HEART'S-EASE.

I fold my old coat me about,
And carol long, and carol stout.
—*The Pilgrim.*

There is no time so miserable but a man may be true. —*Shakspere.*

A sickly self-love, full of self-pity, cannot be touched without screaming. Touch it with the end of your finger, and it thinks itself flayed alive.
—*Fenelon.*

The chief pang of most trials is not so much the actual suffering itself as our own spirit of resistance to it. —*J. N. Grou.*

Ah, if you knew what peace there is in an accepted sorrow! —*Mdme. Guyon.*

Every lot is happy to one who bears it with tranquillity. —*Boethius.*

Why should I start at the plow of my Lord that makes deep furrows on my soul? He is no idle husbandman; he purposeth a crop.
—*S. Rutherford.*

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God! —*Psalmist.*

Then the devil leaveth him; and behold angels came and ministered unto him.
—*Gospel Narrative.*

HEART-ACHE AND HEART'S-EASE.

"All of us have cause
To wail the dimming of our shining star;
But none can cure our harms by wailing them."
—*Shakspere.*

"Hushed be every thought that springs
From out the bitterness of things!"
—*Wordsworth.*

Our deepest experiences have been described as a silent dialogue between the soul and God. The soul speaks through its sense of need, imperfection, fear: God answers in our hopes, our trust, our clearer vision. Our emotions are like divine lessons, or like drawings toward some higher destiny,—lessons we may fail to learn, drawings we may easily resist. We are creatures of passion, weakness, fault, aspiration: we oscillate and

vacillate between content and restlessness, joy and pain.

The shady side or the seamy side of life must have a meaning and a purpose. Vinet says, "Nothing teaches the soul so many things as sorrow"; and the wise Teacher pronounces a blessing on them that mourn. Something like suffering seems to be set down in the programme,— provided for as a part of our earthly lot. The infant smiles; but also the infant weeps. All the little ones have their griefs; and those who are too old or too proud for tears do not escape.

Literature is full of confessions: human breath escapes in sighs as well as in laughter; and often through the music of joy runs an undertone, a minor key, of sadness. But the loud sounds of the world are not the sounds of woe. Mirth is noisy. Sorrow lowers its voice. Often it is silent, muffled, and suppressed within the heart; and, when a smile is on the lips, there may be a

wearying and weakening sense, as of inward bleeding.

Multitudes, both of men and women, live under the shadow of some nameless, unspoken grief, — some disappointment in their life-plans, their business, ambitions, affections, — their hopes blighted, the brightness of their morning turned to a dull, gray day.

What a world of heart-aches comes from the maladjustment of personal relations, — from chronic misunderstandings, and from the apparent impossibility of good understanding, between those who must nevertheless share the same home and the same lot, if not for better, then for worse! Sometimes there are brothers and sisters, who have been dandled on the same knees and have slept in the same chamber, but who, as they grow up, find that they cannot speak to each other without exciting some antagonism or antipathy, — never any sweet agreement, but always some petty difference, some jangle or jar of temperament.

Between husband and wife, who could not and would not separate, there may be all degrees of inharmony, and so on both sides all degrees of heart-ache. How many people carry the marks of some inward bruise, inflicted all unawares!

> "These heavy feet still in the mire
> Go trampling blossoms without end;
> These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
> Amid the heart-strings of a friend."

Many are heavy-hearted because over-weighted with sensitiveness. They feel every tone, look, or breath of criticism or disapproval, or they crave sympathy and appreciation, and wither in loneliness and neglect. The world moves on, and they seem left behind, over-looked, unconsidered, forgotten, as if they were counted only for nobodies.

Others are wretched because they are full of ungratified desires. Like caged birds, they beat their wings against the bars of hard unyielding circumstance. Or perhaps, with

strong, active impulses, they do not know how to place themselves anywhere in the busy world.

How many seem to themselves the victims of a pitiless, blind fate, which consigns them to failure and defeat, or shuts them up in conditions that affect them like a prison-yard, where they are loaded with ball and chain, and condemned to toil that brings no reward! A sharp pain or an acute attack of illness may soon be over and done with, leaving one in better health than before. One can bear the suffering that promises to be short-lived; but there are chronic miseries that grow stale, that rouse no fortitude, but leave one to settle into life-long weariness and irresolution.

Some — God only knows how many! — are born under a shadow, — born with very little capacity for joy or hope. What can be more pathetic and pitiful than the look of age on the faces of little children that never smile, — children that may grow to manhood and

womanhood, and yet never discover that the sunshine is God's smile, and that life is his good gift. These are the victims of hereditary wrong, of unloving marriage: they come into an evil inheritance. Ah, if only science or religion could, somehow, teach the human race to stop this onflowing stream of misery, so that no "black drop" of it might flow into the veins of any helpless babe!

What another world of heart-ache is summed up in the word "loss,"—bereavement!

"Who lives unhaunted by his loved ones dead?
Who with vain longing seeketh not to borrow
From stranger eyes the home lights that have fled?"

Who has not longed through the night-watches

"For the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still"?

Yet keener is the pain when self-reproach mingles with our thought of the departed.

"It takes each failing on our part,
And burns it in upon the heart
With caustic power and cruel art."

Our own faults are indeed the heavier part of the burden we carry about in memory. To finer natures, the wofullest heart-ache is the knowledge that we have caused another's heart to ache. But, when any experience of wrong done or of wrong endured has once made us sad, it is easier to be sad again; and one may form a habit of brooding which darkens all the day and doubly darkens all the night.

Does not this give us a hint about the cure of heart-ache? "Why art thou cast down? Hope thou in God." Occupy the mind with good; turn the thought to higher and better things.

Bodily pain is caused by pressure upon some nerve of sensation. Withdraw the pressure, and the pain ceases. An excess of blood rushes to the spot or is arrested at the spot which has been cut or bruised; the blood presses hard upon the nerves, and perhaps produces heat, or inflammation. Relief comes from drawing away this excess of blood. Just

so when the forces of thought and feeling are centred upon a sad fact,—no matter what,—the mind suffers pain or grief from this abnormal pressure. Relief comes from turning the mental forces in another direction,—forward, outward, upward,—away from the sore point. We must make room for other thoughts, feelings, interests; and, if these are worthy of us, the process of healing will begin at once. Of course, to plunge into empty frivolity and dissipation—to try to drown or bury our woes in sensual indulgence, or to seek fortitude in coarse stimulants—is to trust to a remedy which is worse than the disease. "Hope thou in God." Find relief by bringing the being into the harmonies of law, light, and love.

Hence the curative effect of all honest work, all wise use of our active faculties. Indeed, our disquiet is often caused by the uneasy stirring within us of powers not sufficiently exercised. Idle men and women, with genius

or talent of any kind, are often victims of depression. Robert Leighton, a Scotch poet, speaks of his art as medicine: —

> "If I am long
> Without the exercise of poesie,
> My spirit ails, my body's somewhat wrong,
> My heart beats, 'Woe is me!'"

But all his ailments leave, and body and mind come well again, when the stream of rhythmic thoughts begins to flow.

> "And so, I doubt not, his creation makes
> A healthier current in the Painter's veins,
> Or that his marble inspiration takes
> Away the Sculptor's pains.
>
> "And Music, which usurps a sweet control
> In any heart through which its marvel floats,
> Is physic to the body and the soul
> Of him that builds the notes.
>
> "The spirit craves to do its noblest thing:
> It is a poison in the blood suppressed.
> And thus the Arts are medicines, that bring
> Healing and joy and rest."

Not the fine arts alone, but all the useful ones, have this curative virtue. Any worthy

industry, any occupation of mind or hand about our proper business, lightens care, soothes grief, heals hurts, and drives away the blue devils. "In idleness alone is perpetual despair." There is no peace for us in good-for-nothingness. If once the higher powers in us are awake, they chafe against our own sluggishness; they will not let us rest, they glare at us in our very dreams.

But all such misery is mercy: it compels us to realize that we are not made in vain. Before the sunlight of honest occupation the shadows fly. We do not need to shun sadness nor to seek cheerfulness: when we attend to our proper affairs, the sadness goes of itself and the cheerfulness comes of itself. Indeed, we forget to mind our own moods, sad or glad: —

> "Not enjoyment and not sorrow
> In our destined end or way;
> But to *act*, that each to-morrow
> Find us farther than to-day."

There is a deep *social* reason for much of this inward restlessness and urgency. All that is best in us struggles for expression because it does not belong to us alone. It belongs to others; the goods must be delivered. No gift, no talent, or faculty, is merely private property. The right use of our powers, our opportunities and our time puts us in direct relation to our fellow-beings. Whether it be a day's work, a sermon, or a song, we owe it to somebody. Even a silent meditation in solitude may fit us for some truer service.

"What shall I say? In my heart words are springing
Transcending all speech, and as deep as the sea;
All that is best in me breathes in my singing,
Binding forever your spirits to me."

When we allow our best life to unfold and express itself in word or deed, or to go out from us as pure influence, we grow like God, whose utterance creation is. And always we find it more blessed to give than to receive.

We are ourselves served best by serving others. Maggie Tulliver was helped out of dismal moods when "she learned to look at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole." She read in Thomas à Kempis something like this: "The love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything else in the world." The cure of heart-ache, then, is to be found in occupations which take us away from our petty self-regardings, our self-pityings, our morbid broodings, and which connect our life with other lives and with other affairs, or merge our individual interest in the larger whole. Our private sorrows will look smaller when we accustom ourselves to care for the larger life of the world, for the good of the community, for the public welfare, for the spread of truth and righteousness among mankind. The man who keeps public spirit alive in his own bosom, or who really cares for those who are near to him, has such large and varied interests that he has neither

time nor inclination to cosset and cuddle his own griefs.

The craving for sympathy is natural enough, and it ought never to be treated harshly, nor thought of as a fault; but it easily becomes ignoble and very morbid, because very selfish. "Oh, if somebody only knew how much I suffer, and would suffer with me!" But would it not be quite as well if I could myself forget it,—put it out of my own sight as much as possible? Why should I wish to lay my burdens on others, or make their hearts ache because mine does? It might be very noble in them to share the pain; but would it be noble in me to put it on them? Better that I seek to lighten the load of some other than that I be looking around for some other to carry mine. Would it be worth while to occupy anybody's time with the recital of my private trials and ailments? What if everybody should engage in exchanging this kind of goods?

Would the world be enriched by such commerce?

Love is the true and sure cure of heart-ache, even if it is often the cause of it. But what is love? I think the genuine article is wise, unselfish interest in other people's welfare; interest in other lives than my own; it is to be happy in their happiness. If I have but little happiness of my own, this is one way to borrow some,—by being glad in the gladness of others. As age comes on, I can cheer my own wintry days with sunbeams gathered from the springtime of young people and from the smiling faces of children. This will save me from the shame of casting a shadow across their life; the light in my face will be a reflection of their own.

"Hope thou in God." We are *saved* by hope; that is, by looking forward, and not backward.

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been.'"

Well, then, if these words are so sad, why say them or dwell on them? Things might have been very different, it is true; but that is not worth saying or thinking more than once. John Weiss says, "An accomplished fact takes its place in the divine order, against which it is sacrilege to rebel." A healthy mind doesn't stop to look back long at success, much less at defeat. Such a mind turns promptly from what has been to what comes next, whatever it may be. If we are foolish and sentimental enough, we can get a deal of misery even out of our past blessings. Burns for once drops into a wail,—

> "Ye'll break my heart, ye little birds,
> That warble from the flowery thorn;
> Ye mind me of departed joys,
> Departed never to return."

And why should the memory of departed joys turn to pain and break one's heart? Rather let us take them as pledges of more joys to come, as samples of the good things our

Father has in store, even as the old Hebrews renewed heart and hope by singing, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped."

I am sure, too, that there is a fountain of heart's-ease in the brave acceptance of whatever sorrows and trials fall to our lot. When Jesus stands fronting the cross, he says to himself, as well as to his faint-hearted followers, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

When a man takes on himself a heavy burden because he knows it belongs to him to carry it, he feels a glow of satisfaction because he *can*. The strength keeps coming to him. It almost seems as if the burden gave him wings. But, if he is sulky or cowardly, or if he whimpers and pities himself, or envies other people who seem to have no loads to carry, he will have plenty of heart-ache, and back-ache, too. There are many worse things in the world than burden-bearing; and we shall miss some of the *best*

things if we try to find an easy path through life by shirking our proper tasks.

Humboldt thought, "It is quite possible to suffer many and great griefs, and yet not to feel thoroughly unhappy in consequence, but rather to find our moral and intellectual nature so purified and exalted thereby that we would not change this feeling for any other." Probably few of us can realize this in the midst of trouble. "No trial for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward it worketh the peaceable fruits of righteousness." Certainly, people who never taste anything but sweets, who are always and altogether comfortable and easy-going, are not the ones who make the world's noblest history. They are apt to be indifferent and content with animal satisfaction. Nothing rouses them to heroism or spurs them to seek moral excellence for themselves or for others. Suffering, or pain, taken alone, is not a good in itself. It is a condition of

discipline. It develops fortitude and soul-strength. It reveals and cures weaknesses, and it schools us to sympathy. No great thing is accomplished without *pains*-taking,—a most significant word! Indeed, the world is continually redeemed and saved from evil by the brave souls who bring suffering on themselves *because* they are full of sympathy, full of self-sacrifice, and willing to bear the woes of others. Hear Coleridge:—

> "Was it meet,
> When my unnumbered brethren toiled and bled,
> That I should dream away the intrusted hours
> On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart
> With feelings all too delicate for use?"

Think of Jesus in the garden on the night of his betrayal,—the last night of his life: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." Just at that moment his enemies were jubilant, exultant. They had set a trap that was sure to catch him. They had found a traitor in his own company: for thirty

pieces of silver they could buy his crucifixion! But, looking back on it all, who had the best of it? Better to drink the bitter cup with him, better to weep with him under the trees and to bleed with him on the cross, than to share the palace of the high priest and the banquet of Pilate.

We need not cultivate sadness, nor go out of our way to hunt for crosses; but we can meet our fate and face our trials as we take the changes of the weather, not trying to count the raindrops, nor minding the gusty flaws that blow across the road we must travel. Some degree of discomfort is an incident of the journey: we must count it as a part of our necessary expenses, and forget it in the same way.

In Browning's rendering of the old Greek play, when Queen Alkestes lies dead, the people gather at the palace gate, half-paralyzed with gloom, but chattering mournfully, as if every little incident or aspect of the hour

were of awful import. Then the hero Heracles appears on the scene, half-man and half-god, with his "great, interrupting voice." The private grief of King Admetus, as measured by his weeping friends, suddenly

"Shrank to a somewhat pettier obstacle
I' the way of the world: they saw good days had been,
And good days, peradventure, still might be."

"The gay cheer of that great voice"—the voice of the hero with "the irresistible, sound, wholesome heart"—flows among them like a breeze among vapors or like sunlight among shadows. His very presence lifts them above all clouds, so that they can look down and see how small a part of the infinite creation the clouds can ever cover. If any of us covet to be useful to our companions, what contribution can enrich them more than this "sweet, infectious health," this inspiration of courage and good cheer?

Perhaps, therefore, the best use I can make of this subject is to show what a poor subject

it is, after all,—what small business it is to be feeling of our feelings and watching our moods, to see whether we have heart-ache or heart's-ease. "Happy, my brother?" exclaims Carlyle. "First of all, what difference is it whether thou art happy or not? To-day becomes yesterday so fast: all to-morrows become yesterdays; and then there is no question whatever of the happiness, but quite another question. Nay, thou hast such a sacred pity left, at least for thyself, thy very pains, once gone over into yesterday, have become joys to thee. Besides, thou knowest not what heavenly blessedness, what indispensable sanatory virtue is in them. Thou shalt only know it after many days, when thou art wiser."

While we sit brooding over our troubles and the hardships of our lot, the great world goes tranquilly on, the infinite sky hangs over us, the everlasting order abides, and "God is where he was." Can we not forget or endure

our pestering "insect miseries" for a little while in the presence of the eternal laws and eternal powers? If we keep our souls in patience, if we hold fast to our faith and hope and love, the soft streams of healing power will flow into us and through us. We shall receive and give out the infinite good. We shall share and promote the endless circulations of benefit.

NUMBERING OUR DAYS.

The moving finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on. Nor all your piety and wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.
— *Omar Khayam.*

Every hour comes with some little fagot of God's will fastened upon its back. —*Faber.*

This hour is mine with its present duty. The next is God's; and when it comes, His presence will come with it. —*Anon.*

A man makes no noise over a good deed; but passes on to another, as a vine to bear grapes again in season. —*Marcus Aurelius.*

If thou hast yesterday thy duty done,
And thereby cleared thy footing for to-day,
Whatever clouds shall dark to-morrow's sun,
Thou shalt not miss thy solitary way.
— *Goethe.*

NUMBERING OUR DAYS.

"Teach me your mood, O patient stars!
Who climb each night the ancient sky,
Leaving on space no shade, no scars,
No trace of age, no fear to die."

—*Emerson.*

Let us try to look out on the universe as children who watch their father at his work. We know something of what has been done; we know something of what is now doing. Creation is a visible fact; it is almost a visible process. We see worlds formed and launched into space; we see suns lighted up and systems set in orderly array; we see the vast void marked off into circles — paths for shining orbs; we see everywhere light, motion, life. Creation seems to be organized

and directed like a mighty orchestra, and the infinite harmonies are played with unseen fingers, as many fingers as there are masses or atoms of matter. How delicate and exact is every touch! how firm and masterful! So perfect is the rhythm of nature's movements, so nicely adjusted is the balance of forces, that the philosophers have thought of the Creator as the supreme Master of Mathematics, and have tried to find in numbers the secret of His method — a method which makes possible infinite variety inside of unbroken unity. "God geometrizes," says one; "God's true name is Measure," says another. All the processes are set to music; all the worlds keep time. Creation is a vast clock-work, and even to our eyes the sky is a dial-plate.

> "For the world was built in order,
> And the atoms march in tune."

Thus nature is the registration-office where our days are numbered. Dr. Martineau finds this distinction between man and the other

inhabitants of the world: that he alone can tell what o'clock it is. "Other creatures travel down the path of time, but he alone can count the steps." To man alone is given the wit to construct a calendar, to take note of the passing seasons, to keep anniversaries, to reckon duration by centuries, and to lift the awful veil of the future by prophetic instincts and hopes.

In all this the man-child is trying to think the Father's thoughts. Nature is our text-book of arithmetic. We measure time by the rhythmic movements of the earth and moon, of the sun and stars. The Hebrew poet of Creation sings that "God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven, to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years." This solemn march of time, does it not mark the stately footsteps of that Power "whose goings forth have been of old, even from everlasting?"

"While like a tide our minutes flow,
The present and the past,
He fills His own immortal *now*,
And sees our ages waste."

The part we have in time is appointed by the same fateful wisdom which sets each star in space. We, too, have our orbits; we, too, move amid the boundlessness; we are sheltered by the same laws; we are cared for by the same Providence; we are a part of the Cosmos, — the great, beautiful, ordered world.

The word "universe" holds one of the sublimest conceptions man has reached. It represents our conviction that all the manifold realities and phenomena of existence are included in one order and are the expression of one Mind. This vast variety of things is gathered up into complete unity. Of late, the spectrum has been bringing us reports from distant stars; and the scientists have learned with great delight that those stars are composed of the same materials which make

our own globe. Professor Dana says that "a text-book on crystallography, physics, or celestial mechanics, printed in one of our printing-offices, would serve for the universe."

But we feel not half the grandeur and wonderfulness of our being by looking on ourselves as inhabitants of a material realm; we see not half the majesty and glory of creation with our outward eyes. God is not occupied in playing with balls, however large and shining; He is busy in an industry worthy of His own spiritual nature; He makes and manages the physical order as a nursery of souls, a training-school for children that may call Him their Father. As Swedenborg would teach us, all the heavenly societies, all the angelic orders, are composed of spirits who once lived in bodies like ours, and graduated from some of the countless worlds that are like our earth.

If this be true, the days that we number here must have a value and a meaning which

does not all appear in our bodily experiences. They are given us "that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"; that we may learn and practise the lessons of that life which outlasts the fleeting days.

In those rare moments when we are most responsive to the touch of nature and to the voices of the soul, it is easy to realize that we are embosomed in an infinite order; that we are continually dealt with by the wisdom which manages all worlds, raising them from night and nothingness, leading them through the course of their wonderful destiny, and taking us along with them. Are we not riding on a star among the stars, and is not every year what William Gannett calls "a year of miracle"?

If we recall what we have witnessed and have experienced in any twelve months' procession, it will grow clear that every day is a sample of eternity and that every fact is a revelation. For the laws which govern

spirit, like those which govern matter, come in everywhere, and always; they find room for their sweep and sway in our commonest concerns. The powers of creation and providence, of retribution and redemption, are just as young and fresh, just as active and complete, in us and in the world around us, as they were ten thousand ages ago, or as they will be ten thousand ages to come. The times in which we are living, and which we regard as merely ordinary, are what the old Hebrews would reverentially call "the years of the right hand of the Most High."

The laws of causation are constant and uniform. The waters wear the stones; the coast-lines slowly shift; the earth's strata tell the story of the geologic ages; and perhaps each atom bears some modifying trace of every vibration or process in which it has played a part. The forester counts the years of a tree's life by the rings in its woody

trunk. But as these annual growths differ in thickness, he can tell or guess what years were friendly or backward, warm or cold, wet or dry, just as by knots in the wood or scars in the bark he can tell the output or loss of buds and limbs. Thus the tree writes in itself the history of its life and the record of all passing seasons.

To an eye that sees all things as they are, each man's inner being must contain the stored-up results of all his choices and conduct, and of all the forces and principles that have affected his mind and heart. We number our days as the tree its years; they go to the making of us what we are and what we are to be. Indeed, what we call our character is simply the sum of inward effects produced by thought, feeling and volition,— a sum which includes the influences we have actively or passively accepted from nature, from our fellow-creatures, and from the invisible world which we forever inhabit.

Matters do not stand with any of us as they did a year ago. Our life has grown richer or poorer, deeper or shallower; we are better or worse; more under the rule of truth and right, or less. The voice that calls us upward sounds nearer and clearer, or farther off and fainter, according as we have heeded or neglected its invitations. God is where He was. We have changed; we have come nearer to Him by the rising quality of our life, or we have gone away from Him by sinking into lower habits and under the dominion of lower principles.

This means that some days count for more than others, because we put more into them and get more out of them. No day is bright when the mind is dull, no day is dull when the mind is bright. And those are great days which yield great events. But what we call an "event" is always an outcoming of what went before. There comes a day when the blossoms open, when the ripe fruit

falls, when the ship enters port. And, after weary climbing, one reaches a terrace or a summit, draws deeper breath, surveys the wider prospect, and feels rewarded for the toil.

But the great days of life are not the days when something happens outside of us. They are the days when something happens inside,— days of spiritual expansion; days of discovery or illumination, when we gain clearer perception of high realities, see deeper meanings in life; days of moral re-enforcement, when we make decisions and are prepared for worthier achievement. What a day for the blind, when the scales fall and his eyes are opened! A *white* day,— a day of light! Our greater birthdays are the days when we enter into truer life and come into possession of that inner good which is our proper inheritance as children of God.

The moral question refuses to wait: it presses for an immediate and decisive answer.

Every turn of life is a crisis, in which the Spirit softly says, "This is the way; walk ye in it." And at every turn we obey or disobey, and bring inward or outward consequences as sure as seed-time brings harvest. Therefore, I count it the best and whitest of all days when a man accepts heartily, wholly, and in loving choice the higher law of life,—the day when he welcomes the sacred yoke of duty, and gives the throne of his heart to the true King. Some call it coming to Christ and being converted. Such phrases are none too strong, and they carry divine meaning. But never mind the dialect: let us seek the thing. And the thing, the great, blessed thing, is that every lower motive shall give way to the *love of good*, which, as Channing loved to say, is identical with the love of God. How else can any soul of man hope to stand erect, or feel secure, or find his real place, or come into possession of that greatest good which is his proper inheritance?

In reflecting on what the days have done or may do for us, we naturally think about life and time. What is life? No definition seems to make it plain; but perhaps we have a right to say that life is our share of God. While we touch the transient, and leave it, we live in the Eternal, and never leave it. Our lives are set fast in the larger life, like the limbs and leaves of a tree. In the very act of contemplating ourselves, we look into the infinite; just as in contemplating a star we look into the boundlessness of space. Without space, no stars; without God, no life. The more we ponder, the more we wonder. The mystery of our own existence forever connects itself with that larger Mystery which makes our existence possible; and we feel with wonder and awe, "how good it is to be alive!"

And what is time? It is our present share in eternity. Duration, like space, is infinite; it has neither beginning nor end. But as the

orbit of every star is a circle enclosing some tract of the immeasurable space, so our earthly life takes in some tract of the immeasurable duration. Our limited being can only take in a little; and it is therefore fortunate for us that time is marked off in periods, as space is measured out by boundaries. But these littles give us a hint of the large, as a drop is a hint of the ocean.

To us mortals, life and time, within these limitations of sense, are conditions of everything else. Emerson exclaims: "Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous." What can we do with health and a day? We can live, consciously or unconsciously, in infinite space and infinite time; we can take in something of the universal life and the Godlike forces; we can come in touch with nature, humanity and the Supreme Spirit. Between every rising and setting sun we can gain visions of truth and beauty; we can exercise affections of

goodness and purity; we can put our powers of mind and body under the discipline of virtue and usefulness; we can live and learn and love; we can do and enjoy and grow. Thus, in the very act of finding the world around us, we find ourselves, and acquire the use of our faculties. We store up the results of observation and reflection; we become acquainted with reality; we keep step with the larger order. We can convert the days and years into building material for the temple of a noble personality. How precious, then, is time; how sacred, then, is life!

At a funeral, I often find myself asking, "What did the man whose body lies here get out of his earthly years? He came into this world an infant, with empty hands; what did he carry with him when he left? He has moved about among his fellows; he has looked on the earth and sky, and into human eyes; thousands of days and nights have passed over his head; he has seen the flowers

come and the leaves fall; he has felt the fever of desire and the chill of disappointment; he has heard words of truth, and soft inward calls of reason and conscience. God gave him time and opportunity. What did he do with time? What use did he make of opportunity? What did he get out of life?" But, for the dead, I know not how to answer these questions. They all turn into the prayer, "So teach us, who still move about among these fading phantoms,—so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!"

Let us not shrink from a wholesome self-questioning. As the years go by, does life acquire deeper meaning and higher value? Do we care more for good things, and most for the best? Are we more ready to take a hint of improvement, more open to the reproofs of truth, more sensitive to the distinctions of right and wrong? Have we been growing more reasonable, calm, self-

possessed; more amenable to discipline, and so more skilful in the worthy use of our faculties? Does nature seem more and say more to us because our eyes have opened to its pictures, our ears to its music, our hearts to its wonders? And this human world in which we live and move and have our being, — has it schooled us to a better understanding of what it is to be just and kind, pure and true, helpful and glad? Have we grown stronger to resist evil example, and yet more tender in our compassion toward human frailty and folly? Have we been drawing closer in fellowship to all good people, and more willing to do our part in all good work? If we can say yes to such questions, let us thank God, who has helped us so to number our days as to learn from them the wisdom of the heavens.

Every year is full of opportunities. Our pleasures and our pains, our victories and defeats, our gains and our losses, the flowers

that have bloomed along our path and the thorns that have torn our flesh,—when we have left them all behind, can we not see in the review that they were part of our spiritual training?

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He lives most
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

By the right use of things seen and temporal we shall really rise into communion with things unseen and eternal.

"All common things, each day's events,
That with the hours begin and end,
Our pleasures and our discontents,
Are rounds by which we may ascend."

In climbing this ladder of life we leave the rounds behind, and they are soon forgotten. So must it be with the days themselves, and with what they bring. One glance backward

tells this story of merciful forgetfulness. How many things now look little which once looked large! Who cares to remember his toilsome days or his tossing nights, the pains that wrenched his nerves, or the pangs that smote his heart? It is much the same with the pleasures, achievements, and applauses that gratified us most. The events that began with the hours ended with the hours; and our entire past is rapidly gliding from us to mingle with the vague memories of childhood. Does the traveler remember his steps? Does the sailor remember the billows he crossed, or the winds that helped or hindered? The steps must be taken, the voyage must be made; but the incidents by the way are forgotten in the destination. Welcome the experiences that conduct us to wisdom and goodness, to power and peace! Welcome all "the rounds by which we may ascend"! Welcome, too, the oblivion which gently closes the past behind us as the future

opens before us. It may be that in the long days of eternity the whole of this life will fade from memory as already its earliest years have faded.

And if we do but move steadily upward, the light will increase; these "common things" will shine with heavenly meanings; higher forces will act on us and through us; new faculties and new fountains of feeling will open within us, changing our burdens to wings; and our light afflictions, which some time we shall see were but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

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